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ABSTRACT

A study investigated students' perceptions of the Role of the Reader Project, which was designed to legitimize, normalize, and validate the experiences of all students representing racial and ethnic groups in Canada's multicultural society through the identification and discussion of racial and ethnic bias in literature and through the teaching of a multicultural curriculum. Subjects, about 80 male and female junior and senior high school students from the many cultures represented in Canadian classrooms, were chosen by teachers who felt positive about their own implementation of the Role of the Reader program. Information was gathered by means of a series of focus group interviews. Results of the interviews indicated that: (1) students appeared to have a much greater knowledge of racial and cultural biases than they were being given credit for by the education system; (2) either the issue of racial and cultural bias was being appropriately addressed in the classroom or it was not being addressed at all; and (3) the interviewers, teachers, and school administrators became more aware of the racially sensitive material with which all teachers were being confronted. (Appendixes containing a list of books used in the English curriculum questions for student interviews, and additional student comments are attached.) (RS)

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RESEARCH REPORT

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ROLE OF THE READER

1989

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE READER PROJECT

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Kerry Johnston Patricia Crawford

July 1989

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This project was co-sponsored by the English Department and the Educational Research & Evaluation Services Department of Curriculum & Instructional Services.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE READER PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

In 1985, in response to increasing interest and concern regarding reading materials for the Intermediate and Senior Divisions of the English curriculum, the Coordinator of English and the Supervisor of Race and Ethnic Relations developed a plan to assist teachers in making positive use of literature containing bias. This plan originated from the work conducted over the past decade by the Textbook Approval Committee, English departments, and individual teachers who have addressed the question of bias in literature.

On 15 May 1985, the first step of that plan was realized in the form of a workshop for the English Leadership Council in which heads, chairpersons, and conveners, or representatives from their staffs, examined the responses of students who had studied literature that contains racial and ethnic bias and discussed their own use of such literature. To acquire data about how students from various groups felt and thought about the literature they study, teachers from middle, junior high, and secondary schools across North York invited their students to participate in a survey on literature containing racial/ethnic bias. A sample of about thirty students from a wide variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds was interviewed by the Coordinator of English and the Supervisor of Race/Ethnic Relations. The questions to which they responded anonymously were based on classics approved for use in North York schools. Students' responses were then collated under six headings and distributed to the teachers at the workshop for discussion. The first Role of the Reader report, **The Role of the Reader in the Curriculum: A Report**, provided the highlights of this workshop and students' responses.

The responses of English teachers to this report in late 1985 and early 1986 established two further directions for the English Leadership Council's committees, The Learning Materials Committee and The Role of the Reader Committee. In their concern for developing strategies for teaching literature that contains bias and for expanding the range of multicultural materials available to their students, English teachers recognized that a curriculum may contain bias by **commission** because it includes literature which contains racist attitudes and stereotypes and by **omission** because it excludes literature that represents the diversity of students' cultures and experiences. This supports the approach of learning to identify explicit and implicit biases (both negative and positive) in learning materials and then developing strategies for addressing such biases.

The Learning Materials Committee consequently undertook the mandate to examine new multicultural materials suitable for use at the Intermediate and Senior Divisions and to recommend their approval to the Coordinator of English. The North York Board of Education subsequently approved the use of these new multicultural materials.

In addition, the Role of the Reader Committee organized a second workshop which was held on 22 May 1986. Teachers were asked to anticipate student responses to different literary genres that contain bias and to develop collective strategies for teaching these genres in the classroom. The report of that workshop, **The Role of the Reader in the Curriculum: The Second Report**, was sent to administrators and teachers in every secondary, junior high, and middle school in October 1986.

A subsequent questionnaire, completed in March 1987 by teachers, chairs, conveners and department heads of English, about the dissemination of the second report and the use that teachers in North York had made of it elicited further requests for assistance. The results were published in **A Report on the Implementation of the Role of the Reader Project during the 1986 - 1987 School Year.**

Consequently, the Role of the Reader Committee planned and organized a workshop for leaders of English and Drama in the secondary, junior high, and middle schools. This workshop, held on 20 May 1987, was the third in the series of on-going workshops designed to assist teachers in identifying racial and ethnic bias in literature and in using that literature to further anti-racist education in their classrooms. **The Role of the Reader in the Curriculum: The Third Report** is drawn from the expertise and experience of these North York leaders in education.

The ultimate goal of the Role of the Reader Project is to legitimize, to normalize, and to validate the experiences of all students representing all racial and ethnic groups in our multicultural society through the identification and discussion of racial and ethnic bias in literature and through the teaching of a multicultural curriculum. Teachers of English language and literature are at the centre of the struggle to shape a multicultural society. At the heart of the teaching of English is **interpretation:** the exploration of levels of meaning, and the questioning and analyzing of people, their relationships, their behaviours, and their experiences, and **expression:** the use of language in shaping thought, objective and subjective reporting, bias in presentation, and the effect of language in influencing perceptions. As English teachers encourage their students to engage in interpretation and expression, they must recognize the bias in the materials that they use, anticipate the potential responses of their students to this bias, recognize and use the responses in their teaching, and create a comfortable enough environment for students to express their personal concerns. They must recognize the impact of literature and language on the reader.

Focus of the Study

A Plan for Addressing the Use of Literature that Contains Bias, as part of the original Role of the Reader plan, outlines several steps to foster the implementation of **Guidelines for Assessing Learning Materials** by English teachers. These steps include the provision of a series of workshops and support materials. The findings of these workshops, designed to examine student responses to and experiences with racial and cultural bias found in literary works currently being studied are the basis for three reports that have been prepared throughout the past four years. Monitoring whether the Role of the Reader project has resulted in the positive use of literature containing racial/ethnic bias is an additional step in the process of implementing the **Guidelines for Assessing Learning Materials**. The Coordinator of English, in conjunction with the Role of the Reader Steering Committee, requested that Educational Research and Evaluation Services provide assistance in this monitoring activity.

Rather than focus on the extent of implementation of the Role of the Reader project by teachers across the system (as was done in the 1987 teacher survey), the study focused on the following two questions:

1) What is the nature of students' experiences with literature containing racial/ethnic bias in the classrooms of teachers who are implementing the Role of the Reader project?

2) What are the implications of this information for the continued implementation of the Role of the Reader project?

METHODOLOGY

The Participants

Information was gathered from a sample of students by means of a series of focus group interviews. Teachers who felt positive about their implementation of the Role of the Reader project were asked to identify two or three students to take part in the interviews. As part of the selection criteria, the students must have read one or more of the listed pieces of literature approved for the North York Board of Education's English curriculum. (See Appendix A.) Teachers were asked to identify both male and female students from all grades and from different racial/ethnic backgrounds to ensure that the sample was as representative as possible. The cultural diversity of the focus groups was exemplified by students from Italian, Greek, Irish, Chinese, Japanese, Jamaican, Trinidadian, Assyrian, Jewish, and East Indian backgrounds. Most interview groups, with the exception of the junior high participants, contained a cross-section of North York secondary schools. The following schools were represented:

A.Y. Jackson	Georges Vanier
C.W. Jefferys	Northview
Downsview	Victoria Park
Earl Haig	W.L. Mackenzie
Emery	Westview
Fisherville	York Mills
George S. Henry	Zion Heights

Other schools which volunteered were unable to participate due to the fact that the literature identified had not been recently taught.

The Interview Process

The discussions were held in an open-forum fashion with an average of 10 students participating in a group. In total, eight focus group interviews were conducted during a two day period in mid-May. The students were encouraged to share their personal feelings and experiences pertaining to literature containing racial/ethnic bias. Two facilitators, one a Psychoeducational Consultant, the other an educator (classroom teacher/school administrator) who has been involved in the Role of the Reader project, posed a series of questions (see Appendix B) ranging from personal thoughts and emotions experienced when familiar or unfamiliar cultures are addressed in class, to topics that the students are interested in discussing as part of their course curriculum.

Student responses were both manually recorded and audiotaped in order for remarks and concerns to be easily categorized according to the questions asked by the interviewers. As was often the case, the students had a tendency to deviate from the specific questions posed, although their comments were quite relevant to the discussion. These expressed opinions, thoughts, questions and concerns were placed into categories that best represented the ideas being conveyed by the participants.

THE FINDINGS

Students' Knowledge of Terminology

After brief personal introductions and a thorough explanation of the purpose and history of The Role of the Reader project, the interviewers asked students to discuss and express their understanding of a variety of terms. A disparity existed between the junior high students and the secondary students in terms of their level of understanding of the definitions of ethnicity, stereotype, culture, race, multicultural, and racism. The majority of the younger participants had a solid grasp of the terms, while amongst the high school students, "ethnicity", "race", and "multicultural" posed some difficulty. Any misunderstandings were addressed, enabling every student to contribute to the discussions with the same basic knowledge of the terminology used. Following this preliminary exercise, the pre-set questions were addressed.

Responses Regarding Students' Own Culture

In response to the query regarding the students' thoughts and feelings when people from their own culture and/or race are focused upon in material studied, two main themes emerged.

- Defensiveness and Discomfort
- Happiness

The feeling of being stereotyped contributed to the discomfort that some students experienced, as did the difficult position in which some were placed after reading negative comments about their race or culture. One student provided insight into this situation by remarking, "...people turn and look at me as if the answer is written all over me..." On the other hand, some students were pleased and eager to have the opportunity to discuss related issues and to enlighten others about their culture. Most students endorsed one or the other of these two prominent, but opposing, views.

Other comments that were less frequently voiced included:

CATEGORY	COMMENTS
Desire to be Ignored:	
Comments assigned to this category express a student's wish to remain unnoticed during class discussions pertaining to racial issues. These students would prefer to divert the focus from their particular culture to something or someone else, therefore avoiding potential difficulty in handling negative comments directed towards their ethnic group.	"I'd rather not talk about it."
	"I feel obligated to pay attention."
	"I'd rather be ignored."
	"I'd prefer not to focus on particular ethnic groups."
	"I just go on reading, get used to it, and don't say anything."

Feeling of Indifference:

This classification contains students' comments that reflect a lack of concern when their race is the dominant topic of a conversation. It doesn't seem to bother these participants as they appear quite willing to accept the fact that with all good things must come some bad, and if people choose to discuss certain negative aspects it is understood that it's all part of the learning process.

"I've become numb to it."

"It doesn't really matter, as long as what's said is the truth."

"You have to take the good with the bad, but everything must be valid."

Desire for a Less Literary Approach:

Many students expressed their view that too often their teachers ignore the issues that an author is trying to illustrate in his/her literature, but rather choose to concentrate on the literary components of a novel. Their comments identified their desire to explore these issues in greater depth and to steer away from the superficial aspects of the English curriculum. The participants felt that a great deal more would be learned during discussions of this type than conducting character analyses for two weeks. The students also highlighted the point that boredom would diminish as their interest level peaked during such debates.

"...should be taught properly so that we can change things."

"You don't get to learn about people's cultural history unless you go and do it yourself." (referring to finding own information)

"Teachers don't seem to want to talk about it, don't know how to handle it, and say it takes up too much class time."

"Sticking to literary aspects gets boring and tedious."

Desire to Discuss Current Issues:

This category pertains mostly to discussions held in other subject areas although there was some carry-over into the English courses. The concern here was that too much time was being devoted to events and situations that occurred a very long time ago. The students expressed a desire to allocate some class time to discussing current issues. A prime example that was given questioned why they (the students) were only learning about the teepees of Native Indians and not about their present lives on reservations, or their fight to regain their land.

"We shouldn't focus on the past but look to the future."

"We're <u>making</u> history so we should be talking about these things now."

"I don't want to spend all of my time talking about people who are dead."

Considering the emotions felt by students when their race or culture was focused upon in class study, it might be expected that opposite feelings would be experienced when their specific culture or race was not the centre of attention. However, this was not found to be the case. Once again, two primary sentiments were expressed by the participants regarding the exclusion of their ethnic groups in class discussions.

- Feeling of being "left out"
- Feeling of indifference/oblivious to situation

Many of the students who communicated a "left out" feeling attributed the lack of attention paid to their race or culture to the fact that their culture was considered less important than others mentioned. These participants voiced the opinion that if controversial issues are a part of the discussions, then everything should be open for debate. Another substantial portion of students, although a slightly smaller segment than mentioned previously, admitted to being oblivious to the fact that their culture was not focused upon in class. According to these students, it really didn't matter and they never consciously noticed such a situation.

A smaller percentage of students conveyed the following sentiments:

CATEGORY	COMMENTS
Desire to Study the Equality of Cultures:	
This category includes remarks communicating the students' wish that rather than identifying the differences between people, similarities and commonalities should be the focus of discussions. Also included are comments reflecting students' pleasure in learning about a variety of races and cultures.	"I like to see common struggles for all people." "It teachers us about different cultures and to appreciate them."
Feeling of Relief:	
Remarks head by this classification express a sort of happiness when their culture is not the central topic. These students would prefer that nothing be said about their race rather than something negative. The participants voicing this feeling have been conditioned to think that the only time their people are in the limelight is when they have committed some kind of injustice.	"No news is good news." "I'm usually relieved because it means my people are not coming under scrutiny." "I feel good when nothing bad is said about my culture."

Desire for Sensitive Handling of Issues:

The comments included in this grouping identify the need for teachers to address value-laden material with special care. The students were very sensitive to each other's possible feelings if an issue was not handled with the degree of respect that it deserved. Some expressed that their own degree of comfort was alterable depending on the handling of a racially sensitive topic.

"My feelings change depending on how racially sensitive materials are handled in class."

"The most important part is that the teacher handle the situation with care and correct the stereotypes in the book where necessary."

"The better teachers dealt with racially sensitive issues and it enhanced my ability to learn and accept."

Student Responses Regarding Others' Cultures

There was an abundance of positive reactions from the students when questioned about their feelings and thoughts when people from other cultures are focused upon in what they study. The vast majority expressed an interest in others' race and cultural history, adding that it "provides spice" to the classroom content.

Some of the remarks made by these interested students included:

CATEGORY	COMMENTS
Desire for a Societal Impact:	
The participants whose remarks were categorized by this heading communicated their support for discussions involving others' cultures. In their opinion, society can only benefit from the increased education about its multicultural communities.	"Learning about different cultures helps to increase people's respect for others."
	"....forces members of society to reflect upon their own way of thinking."
	"....changes how you do and perceive things."
Desire for Increased Knowledge:	
These students do not wish to remain ignorant to our country's diversified population and are seeking the support from our Ministry of Education. It is desirable for them to become knowledgeable about the historical aspects of various races and cultures, as well as about current issues. They feel that with this enhanced repertoire, they will be more capable of encouraging positive relations with members of other ethnic groups.	"I would like to learn more about others' historical backgrounds."
	"I'm interested and want to find out more, especially if I have a friend" (of a different cultural background).
	"I have to struggle to learn but it's satisfying when you try and succeed."

Despite the students' desire to learn about others, a concern that repeatedly crept into the conversation once again pertained to the teacher's handling of controversial issues. It was explained that since there are so many myths and misunderstandings about various races, it is imperative that the teacher address sensitive topics in depth, present them with tact, and explain the context in which the material was originally written, since the aim is to educate and not to offend. The only other opinion expressed on this subject reflected a **nonchalant attitude**. To these few participants it was not a concern one way or another whether their culture or any other was the focus of conversation. In most instances they were not cognizant of the fact that other cultures were being addressed and not their own.

When asked how they thought and felt when people from other cultures and/or races are not focused upon in class assignments, the students communicated three strongly supported emotions.

- Confusion - wondered why?
- Didn't notice/not missed
- Anxiety

These expressed sentiments and concerns were evenly distributed among the participants. The group reporting confusion questioned the rationale behind not focusing upon other ethnic groups. They wondered why a particular group of people dominated the subject of discussion and why, when there are so many interesting cultures, their studies had become so unilateral. The next substantial portion of students said that any lack of multicultural content was not missed, and further reasoned that "we can't discuss them all [cultures]." This type of omission apparently went unnoticed by some students, possibly indicating a lack of interest or a lack of awareness of the many diverse racial issues. Those who expressed anxiety were concerned that they were missing out on valuable information thus inhibiting further learning and understanding of the subject material.

Some of the other comments made are as follows:

CATEGORY	COMMENTS
Desire for Positive Role Models:	
A concern that was voiced by some students identified the lack of positive role models in their current English literature. Many felt the need to be able to relate to someone, a character whose portrayal in a novel was to be admired, not rejected.	"Certain people may try to fit into the group that's portrayed." (If they don't have proper role models with which to identify.)
	"Students might continue believing preconceived [and often incorrect] notions and stereotypes."

Desire for Broader Discussions:

Class conversations revolving around multi-cultural issues have become too narrowly focused in the eyes of some students. They would like to expand the content of the discussions to include a greater range of races, cultures and the conflicts that are experienced as a result of various interactions. Situations to which students may relate are also of interest to these participants.

"It's terrible ... we must discuss all issues that are pertinent to the novel."

"Unless it's brought into the classroom discussions, you don't learn."

"I would like to learn about more than just Black vs. White issues."

Defeatist Attitude:

These young people have unfortunately adopted the view that regardless of what's taught in the classroom, people have already developed their own impressions of members of other cultures. They feel that by this stage in life, one's attitudes and opinions have already been securely formed, thus resisting any external influences, such as education

"You can't change the reader's opinion."

"It doesn't really matter because people's views will remain the same."

<u>Topics of Discussion In and Out of Class</u>

The students provided a fairly extensive list of topics that have been discussed at some time, either in class or outside of class, relating to the books that they've studied. Many of the subjects were introduced by the teacher through group discussions, handouts containing a list of possible conversation topics, or by the students volunteering information relating to the discussion. Unfortunately some of the participants, albeit a few, reported that in their particular classes, little, if any, discussion was initiated beyond the scope of the book's literary elements (e.g., theme, characters, plot, etc.).

The following is a sample list of items discussed by the students:

1. Alienation
2. Bigotry
3. Canada's mosaic vs. U.S. melting pot
4. Cultural diversity and the justice system
5. Holocaust
6. Imagery
7. Injustice done to Canada's Native Indians
8. Internment of Canadians of Japanese origin
9. Prejudicial attitudes of older generations - particularly towards immigrants
10. Racial prejudice
11. Racist humour used by authors and comedians
12. Slavery
13. Symbolism - conventions: Black = evil, White = good

Upon being asked to relay the types of comments made and questions posed when the above issues were being discussed, the participants provided numerous observations which illustrated:

- . the ignorance of others about some cultures
- . particular instances demonstrating bias, prejudice and stereotyping
- . the need for explanations/clarifications of ideas and truths about various races and cultures.

In terms of their own personal feelings and thoughts when these topics, comments, and questions were being discussed, the majority of the students' remarks centered around four prominent themes.

- . Ignore it/learn to live with it
- . Helplessness
- . Awareness of influencing factors
- . Wanting solutions

The participants expressed concern for those experiencing racial discrimination and were quick to identify the need for effective and realizable resolutions to our society's dilemma. They showed knowledge and understanding of the various elements that contribute to the existing and developing stereotypes, were alert to the catalysts of cultural bias, and were eager to demonstrate their willingness to eliminate such unjust treatment of people.

Some of the specific comments made by the students are as follows:

CATEGORY	COMMENTS
Feeling of Learned Helplessness:	
The comments in this category are similar to those in the "Defeatist Attitude" classification. Students here express their desire to help change the incorrect stereotypes of others by taking a stand against the unfair treatment of certain races and cultures. Their difficulty is in believing that their small contributions will collectively have an effect on the population. Rather, they view the situation as hopeless, and that they will never have a great enough impact on others to matter.	"If I stand up against it I may change my friends but I won't change the world." "I feel as though I can't do anything about it." "There's ethnicity awareness but it doesn't make a difference."

Forced Acceptance:

The students who feel into this division appeared to be one stage beyond "Learned Helplessness." By this point, stereotypes and racial and cultural prejudice are accepted as being a fact of life. There didn't seem to be any point in rebelling any longer, rather one should learn to live with it and devote concern to other issues that are at least within the realm of change.

"It's just part of daily life and I have grown to live with it."

"Much of the population has no desire to learn about other cultures, so you just accept things the way they are."

Desire for Solutions:

The statements made by these young people demonstrated their desire to keep fighting for racial and cultural equality. They want solutions, they want input, they want action.

"I hope the Board chooses books with literary merit with enough racist elements to educate."

"I would like to have some input into the curriculum."

"We shouldn't have racial statements that could offend in the present literature."

Sources of Influence:

Many participants illustrated their level of awareness regarding the controversial topics encountered in English literature by identifying the various sources that influence people's perceptions, attitudes, and opinions.

"The character portrayal affects one's perception of that persons's culture."

Personal experiences affect the view of cultures."

"Parents influence their children."

Additional student comments may be found in Appendix C.

<u>Other Topics the Students Would Have Liked to Discuss</u>

It should be noted that during the interviews, two interpretations of the question were made by both the participants and by the facilitators.

What other topics, comments, or questions would you have liked to discuss?

. In your class
. During this interview

The list of subjects in which the students communicated interest included:

1. Factual information -- e.g. the percentage of people who are racist
2. Situation in Africa
3. History of religion and races
4. Solutions
5. Sexism
6. Native Indians
7. Finding books containing no bias or opinions
8. Why the persecutor is the way he/she is
9. Child abuse
10. Interracial and cultural relationships
11. Minorities portrayed as the majority/ruling class
12. Positive role models for minorities
13. How to improve relations with others
14. Use of slang in the classroom and literature
15. Contributions of Blacks -- e.g. Martin Luther King

Concluding Comments

The facilitators involved in the current Role of the Reader project reflected upon the students' remarks, concerns, and experiences, examined the findings, and provided their personal perceptions of the process.

The Psychoeducational Consultants' Perspective

We were very impressed by the openness of the students, their willingness to listen and learn, and their concern for others' feelings. The immediacy of their statements re-emphasized the need for Psychoeducational Consultants to highlight the impact of race/ethnicity during all aspects of our jobs. The depth and honesty of the students' discussions about racism, ethnicity, multiculturalism, etc., reinforced our belief in "small group dynamics" as a powerful educational tool.

Since this technique appears to be a successful one, and since one of the focuses of the Board is the concern about the student drop-out rate, perhaps it would be of some benefit to involve students in small group discussions regarding the decisions made. It is thought that this would make them feel less disenfranchised and more a part of the system, as they expressed great appreciation for recent opportunity to be involved in the Board's decisions regarding the English curriculum.

The Researchers' Perspective

Since a large portion of the discussions centred around topics other than those outlined, many of the comments and concerns voiced by the students are not reflected in the pre-set questions posed by the interviewers. As a result, "The Researcher's Perspective" is designed to include reference to this material.

In the researcher's opinion, the students appear to have a much greater knowledge of racial and cultural biases than they are currently being given credit for by the education system. These young people are bright, articulate and quite up-to-date on current world issues, many of which involve racial and cultural prejudice. They express a strong interest in encouraging and improving our multicultural society and feel themselves to be mature enough to handle some of the more controversial materials in their classrooms. Even those who resent certain racial terms and references communicated a desire to discuss the purpose and context in which the comments were made. However, despite their positive attitudes towards dealing with such content, most, if not all, of the participants hoped that their teachers would present the material effectively, with sensitivity, and treat them (the students) as mature and knowledgeable young adults.

Another impression that was conveyed by the students, and only surfaced upon hearing the comments from all of the discussions, was the fact that either the issue of racial and cultural bias was being appropriately addressed in classrooms or it was not being attended to at all. All seemed to be quite keen on the subject despite the imbalance of racially- and/or culturally-oriented conversations among classes. Some students showed surprise upon hearing the depth of discussion in which their peers would engage while in school. The message the students were sending conveyed a strong desire for their classroom discussions to broaden and branch-out, encompassing greater literary territory and addressing the issues which lie beneath a novel's theme, plot, and character analyses.

The students expressed their pleasure and enjoyment in participating in this exercise and appeared quite gratified for having been able to voice their concerns and opinions. Some demonstrated a desire to be on the Role of the Reader Committee, wherein they could have a direct influence on outcomes that would eventually affect their daily school activities. The students' enthusiasm was poignantly illustrated by their willingness to discuss various controversial issues and by their willingness to share their personal feelings with the other participants, who, for the most part, were relative strangers. The students also expressed their satisfaction and delight upon realizing that the educators were validating topics that for years had been unrecognized or considered unworthy of discussion. They hoped that through their honest communication a change in the present English curriculum may result, enabling all students to broaden their knowledge, increase their understanding and acceptance of others, and improve their relations with the racially and culturally diverse members of our cosmopolitan society.

The Teachers' Perspective

One corollary benefit deriving from the Role of the Reader initiative of North York's English Department was the increased awareness of the interviewers, teachers and school administrators, of racially sensitive materials with which many English, and indeed all, teachers were being confronted. Students and teachers who were the main thrust of the research benefited greatly and a significant improvement was apparent. The impact of the research on the interviewers themselves, however, was unanticipated. As one of those selected to be on the interviewing team, I found myself facing some very disturbing and profound questions about my own reaction to much of the material I was being asked to teach to my students. Through interacting with students whose insight was remarkable, I was forced to alter my complacent attitude toward questions involving racism with which these young men and women were obviously concerned. My "if I don't make too big an issue of it" approach was obviously shortchanging not only my students but my own professional growth.

Now, as a consequence of having been part of the project, I have become more aware of and, hopefully, more skilled in dealing with these far-reaching and problematic issues. But perhaps my most compelling insight was that racism is a pervasive and insidious foe which can be dealt with only through open dialogue and concerted actions by all persons who are involved in the education of young people. To this end the Role of the Reader project is a powerful beginning to an important battle in which the young people of our schools will provide the leadership. On all levels racism must be attacked and eliminated because it is an infestation which is lodged very deeply in the framework of our society. In this, as in may obstacles which face our Canadian culture, education can provide a vital weapon.

The Role of the School Administrator in the Role of the Reader Project

Upon reflection of their daily roles, requirements, and contributions, the administrators who participated in this most recent Role of the Reader project identified some ways in which a school administrator can influence all constituents and all curriculum within the school. If the Role of the Reader project is to be successfully implemented, the Administrator:

- facilitates, provides access to professional development in the area of anti-racist education

- makes staff aware of professional development opportunities given by Central office on Role of the Reader

- supports initiatives such as research into effects of "new found materials" on students' perception of themselves, others

- supervises development, implementation and review of curriculum
  a) course outlines
  b) courses of study

  through departmental liaison to ensure that specific objectives and strategies related to race/ethnic equity are implemented and reviewed

- recognizes and promotes leadership of staff who have participated in racism awareness series and Role of the Reader professional development activities to influence all departments

- identifies objectives related to implementation of Role of the Reader within the School Review process

- encourages staff on S4G to include objectives related to Role of the Reader

- raises issues of material selection with community partners directly through information sessions with parents as well as indirectly

- works through structures such as Curriculum Advisory Committee, Anti-Racist Action Committee of the School to familiarize staff and administration with various Role of the Reader reports, and with them, plans strategies for implementation of the reports

- works through heads of departments (meetings) to identify and support the Role of the Reader in the Curriculum as an approach to be implemented in all subject areas

APPENDIX A

Books Used in the English Curriculum

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The

Always Ask for A Transfer

Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, The

Camels Can Make You Homesick

Dreamspeaker

Ecstasy of Rita Joe, The

Green Days By the River

I Heard the Owl Call My Name

In the Heat of the Night

Kap-Sung Ferris

Leroy and the Old Man

Merchant of Venice, The

Nine Men Who Laughed

Obasan

Of Mice and Men

Othello

Raisin in the Sun

To Kill a Mockingbird

Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry

Underground to Canada

APPENDIX B

Questions for Student Interviews

. How do you feel and what are your thoughts when people from **your** culture and/or race are focused upon in what you study as part of your class assignment?

. How do you feel and what are your thoughts when people from **your** culture and/or race are **not** focused upon in what you study as part of your class assignment?

. How do you feel and what are your thoughts when people from other cultures and/or races are focused upon in what you study as part of your class assignment?

. How do you feel and what are your thoughts when people from other cultures and/or races are **not** focused upon in what you study as part of your class assignment?

. What were some of the topics discussed in class or outside of class (in school or at home) relating to these books?

. What comments were made or questions asked about these topics?

. What went through your mind and/or what were your personal feelings when these topics, comments, or questions were being discussed?

. What other topics, comments or questions would you have liked to discuss? Explain why.

APPENDIX C -

Additional Student Comments

On Mentioning Race/Racism in Class:

"I don't talk about racism because I don't believe in it...there's too much emphasis on differences...people take offense when you differentiate."

"Racists aren't just white - they can be black, blue, purple...all of a sudden it gets to be reverse racism - you're going to be racist to me, I'll be racist to you."

"Even in school, there's racism in the arts...nobody said it out loud but people know before they audition for a major dance company that if they belong to a visible minority they won't be picked to do ballet...so we have formed our own company, we're mostly visible minorities except for two people who were not - we accepted them because they were good dancers - we involved lots of people in making posters for our performances."

"Whenever you hear something good about your race, you feel great...especially when people don't really talk about it much."

"If I'm in a school where they only talk about Whites or books written by Whites, then to me it's racism."

On Black versus White Issues:

"The world's split into two issues of Black and White...even in the school cafeteria Blacks and Whites sit separately."

"You should deal with the Black and White split in class - and prejudice in every form should be dealt with - the reason the Black issue is dealt with more than the others is because the Black groups are coming to the Board and saying "deal with this issue"...until the other groups start doing this, their issues won't be dealt with."

"I feel frustrated when the White race is portrayed as the evil side. What the White race has done in the past doesn't reflect on me. I hate the "bad" image."

"The more we talk about the Black/White conflict, the more racism there is...that's how racism got started."

On Relating to/Understanding Others:

"You know, we talk about South Africa, but you have to relate that to Canada where we have native people living on reservations.

"For Black History Month - all we had was one poster in the library and one book on display about Martin Luther King - but kids don't want to learn about other people's cultures."

"We always want to be able to group ourselves to be identified with somebody, whether it's ethnic, racial, religious or the type of music you want to listen to...you have to have a name so you can be identified with somebody...there has to be a them so there can be an us."

"We don't find out enough about people from other races and ethnic groups that would help us when we meet people outside of school."

On The Concept of "Normal":

"The problem with the multicultural literature we read is that it always deals with problems, something controversial...people don't lead normal lives...everything I do doesn't deal with racism, suffering...I want to read contemporary books written by people of diverse backgrounds, literature about normal life of different ethnic groups not just about problems."

"The characters in multi-ethnic books are not real people - a character is a Black person or an Oriental person but not a real person who lives a normal life."

"You know normal, like British."

On Sources of Influence:

"The media overdoes incidents and makes things worse...it causes racial tensions."

"I don't read the books in school - I go to the library to get books with Blacks in them."

"Some teachers mispronounce people's names and don't learn how to say them...that's really RUDE."

"Teachers need to teach how the world was at that time...and more emphasis should be placed on how things, people's attitudes, got to be the way they are today...if we forget these things - how thing were then and how they are today - we'll repeat the mistakes."

On Science Texts:

"No Black scientists, they're all White Europeans."

"It once said in a book...'and the Chinese invented gunpowder'."

On History Texts:

"All the books we study from are White - not international... (they reflect) a European section of life."

On Literature Used in Class: (ie: Huckleberry Finn, Merchant of Venice, I Heard the Owl Call My Name, Obasan)

"I am not uncomfortable about talking about Jews. To me it was teaching that people used to think like this and it's no longer acceptable but it did exist."

"I think when you are in an English class everyone is trying to be tactful and empathetic, but when you're outside of that classroom, things change and you are not the same - not as nice."

"If we are going to put a controversial book that some people think, like Huckleberry Finn, promotes racism, make sure the teacher goes through it and explains it. If not dealt with, some kids will leave believing it. Can you get teachers to do this? Maybe it should be a teacher's outline."

"I've always hoped that when you picked a book for all the schools that you picked it on the basis that it was a well written book, that it wasn't discriminating too much but enough to educate rather than just a book on Japanese discrimination. It is good that we choose a book like that because we wouldn't read it normally."

On Making Changes:

"You can do something to change school like;

- . have a discussion about racism and how it affects people in class
- . change the course outlines especially in English, bring in new contemporary stuff
- . discuss things like Rushdie's book - if we had some real information we'd understand more...all we get is opinions formed by the media."

"Why is this the first time we've had a chance to talk about something like this?"